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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 005173

SIPDIS

WHITE HOUSE FOR TUCKER ASKEW

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2012

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: OUTSPOKEN JORDANIAN MP SAYS IRAQIS DON'T LIKE
SADDAM, BUT WOULD FIGHT FOR HIM IF FACED WITH A U.S.
INVASION

Classified By: A/DCM Douglas A. Silliman for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

1. (C) In a recent rambling conversation with A/DCM, Mahmoud Kharabsheh (please protect), an outspoken former Jordan MP and former provincial intelligence chief, said that most average Iraqis would not/not support a U.S. military strike on Iraq aimed at overthrowing the regime. He said that, based on monthly trips into Iraq for business negotiations and conversations with "Iraqi friends" in Jordan, most Iraqis do not like Saddam Hussein or the "Tikriti regime," and would be very happy to see the government fall and Saddam leave the scene. He claimed, however, that all the Iraqis with whom he had spoken had had a viscerally negative reaction to the possibility of a U.S. invasion, even if the purpose of the strike was to change the regime. Kharabsheh claimed that several of his business contacts pledged that they would pick up arms and fight any U.S. assault. Kharabsheh speculated that his Iraqi contacts felt that the "dishonor" of possible foreign military intervention was worse than the continuation of the current "brutal" Iraqi regime.

2. (C) In addition, Kharabsheh continued, U.S. Military action against Iraq would solidify the "strong and growing" feeling of anti-Americanism in the Arab street. "If you invade Iraq," he argued forcefully, "you will create a new generation of (anti-American) mujaheddin (holy warriors), just the way you did fighting (the Soviets) in Afghanistan."

3. (C) COMMENT: Based on previous conversations, we know Kharabsheh to be personally opposed to U.S. military action against Iraq, and he almost certainly exaggerated his arguments to make a rhetorical point. Nonetheless, both of his points -- that Iraqis will not welcome U.S. military actions and that military action will inspire a new generation of anti-American violence -- are themes that we have been hearing more in Jordan in recent weeks as the U.S. public debate about the possibility of military action has increased. There are many variations on the theme, including a remark by a Baghdad-based Western diplomat that the Iraqi civilian majority -- hating and fearing the regime, but mistrustful of promises by outsiders -- will simply "lock the doors, close the shutters, and wait it all out."

BERRY